Metropolitan Hilarion speaks at the opening of the conference on Ss Nicholas of Japan and Innocent of Moscow: Culture of the Peoples of Russia, Japan and America



November 8, 2017 – An international academic reflection-action conference on Ss Nicholas of Japan and Innocent of Moscow: Culture of the Peoples of Russia, Japan and America, took place at the Russian embassy in Tokyo. It was held on the occasion of the 220th birthday of St. Innocent (Veniaminov), Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna, Apostle of Siberia and America, spiritual father of St. Nicholas of Japan, Equal-to-the-Apostles. It was organized by the Russian Ministry of Culture as part of the Russian Seasons project, with the support of the Department for External Church Relation (DECR) of the Moscow Patriarchate and the assistance of the Russian diplomatic mission in Japan and the Tokyo representation Rossotrudnichestvo – the federal agency for the affairs of the Commonwealth of the Independent States and compatriots residing abroad and for internal cooperation.

The conference was addressed by Russian ambassador to Japan, Ye. Afanasyev, who pointed to the significance of the church academic forum as clearly stressing the spiritual foundations of the Russian-Japanese relations.

Metropolitan Hilarion opened the work of the conference with his paper on St. Nicholas Equal-to-the-Apostle and St. Innocent of Moscow – Saints Who Bind Nations. He said in particular,

'The present meeting gives us an opportunity to address the spiritual sources of ties between Russia, Japan and America – the Pacific countries – the ties based on the Orthodox faith which was brought to this part of the world by Russian missionaries.

Our meeting takes place in the year marking the 220th birthday of a faithful son of the Russian Orthodox Church and outstanding missionary named as the apostle of Siberia and America for his missionary work – St. Innocent of Moscow. It was St. Innocent who, with already 40 years of apostolic service behand him, managed to show to still young, 24 year-old Hieromonk Nicholas (Kasatkin) in which direction his efforts should be exerted, on what he should focus his work so that his chosen service of the Japanese people might produce positive results.

St. Innocent began his missionary journey in 1823. Still a married man, Priest Ioann Veneaminov, he was the only one who was not afraid of facing difficulties and set off with this family to the remote North American continent to illumine local people. And the Lord rewarded him not only with seven children in flesh but also dozens of thousands children in spirit whom he illuminated with the light of the faith of Christ.

While preaching the gospel among small peoples, he studied their language and culture, everyday life and customs and their religious views. Thus, he compiled the Aleutian alphabet on the basis of Cyrillic characters and compiled and published the first Aleutian ABC book, formulated the grammar basics for this language and translated the Gospel, catechesis and the most common prayers and church hymns.

After his wife's death, Archpriest Ioann took monastic vows in 1840 with the name Innocent and the episcopal rank, while continuing to serve the cause of illuminating peoples in Kamchatka, Aleutian Islands, North America, Yakutia and Khabarovsk region. He devoted almost half a century to the apostolic feat in the severe conditions of the North with its great perils for one's life'.

Metropolitan Hilarion pointed to the faithfulness of St. Innocent to the missionary calling to the end of his life, 'He was 70 when he was transferred to the See of Moscow, but there too he did not abandon his concern for the mission… Thanks to the support and concern of the saint, a Japanese Orthodox Mission

was established in 1870 headed by Archimandrite Nicholas (Kasatkin), the future saint equal to the apostles. In the same year, through the petition of Metropolitan Innocent, dioceses of Yakutia and Vilyijsk, Aleutian Islands and Alaska were opened. St. Innocent was aware of the need for episcopal ministry in the new missionary territories on which an invisible building of the Church of Christ was erected and for this reason also stood up for the establishment of a separate See of Japan and the appointment of Archimandrite Nicholas (Kasatkin) to it as bishop, but he did not live to see it as he died in 1879, only a few months before that moment.

Reviewing the life journey of the two men of God, Metropolitan Hilarion also pointed to the contribution they made to the academic knowledge of the culture and customs of the countries in which the Lord destined him for preaching the word of God. “Nicholas Equal-to-the-Apostles, in his letter to St. Innocent, wrote, ‘For many years… science beckoned me to its field; Japanese history and the whole Japanese literature are completely untouched treasures – once you start taking handfuls of them, everything will be new and interesting in Europe and your work will not be wasted’. Indeed, the works of St. Nicholas became a new academic word in Russian Oriental studies and a truly bright event in the academic literary research of the time”, the archpastor said.

The task of preaching, however, was an absolute priority, His Eminence stressed. ‘St. Nicholas exerted all possible and impossible efforts to encourage Japanese to create a spiritual world and a Church of their own. Clearly evident in this desire of his is the continuity of St. Innocent’s school of mission distinctive as it was by its openness, intelligibility, communicative simplicity and tolerance towards people, a desire to give free scope to their creativity and initiative’.

Metropolitan Hilarion concluded his remarks with the words of Patriarch Sergius (Stragorodsky) of Moscow and All Russia, who in his time also made a contribution to the Orthodox mission in Japan: ‘Orthodoxy is Christianity itself in all its fullness and simplicity… As a gift of heaven, not a human mind, it is above the world, nor is it determined by it. On the contrary, it wishes to regenerate the world by itself. Hence, both here and in the East, Orthodoxy can enter the national consciousness, of course, just as it could enter it in Europe and it will become truly… Japanese faith, just as in Europe it became the Greek, Russian, etc. faith – just do not let anything disturb its pristine purity’.

Presentations on various aspects of the ministry of St. Innocent of Moscow and St. Nicholas of Japan were made by the head of the Japanese Autonomous Orthodox Church Metropolitan Daniel of Tokyo and All Japan, Archbishop Seraphim of Sendai, Hegumen John (Rubin), rector of the St. Nicholas of Ugresha Seminary; clergy of the Japanese Autonomous Orthodox Church, ROC dioceses of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kasimov and Rzhev, professors and researchers from the Russian Academy of Science Institute of the Far East, Tokyo University of Foreign Languages, Moscow State University Institute of Asian and African Countries, Moscow Conservatoire, St. Petersburgh Theological Academy and St.

Nicholas of Ugresha Seminary.

Metropolitan Hilarion's film 'Orthodoxy in Japan' was screened for the conference participants and guests. The film and its version in Japanese were produced with the participation of the St. Gregory the Theologian Charity, which presented each participant with a disk with Metropolitan Hilarion's film made specially for the occasion.

During the conference, Metropolitan Hilarion decorated Mr. D. Shakura, Russian embassy second secretary, with the Russian Orthodox Church's Medal produced in honour of the millennium of the demise of Grand Prince Vladimir, which was awarded him by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in recognition of his assistance to the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church to normalize the situation of the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church.

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/48047/